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THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF THE NEW RURAL RECONSTRUCTION MOVEMENT IN CHINA*

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The topic which was first suggested for this paper was "The Significance for Religious Education of the New Rural Reconstruction Movement in China." Later one of the N.C.C.R.E. secretaries wrote me that the topic would be "The Significance of Religious Education in the New Rural Reconstruction Movement." Now I find the original wording on the program. There is a story of a specialist in Greek nouns in Germany who lamented on his deathbed that he had not concentrated his studies on the ablative case. We shall not spend much time on discussing the prepositions in the topics but admit at the outset that both wordings are suggestive. A generous parishioner once said of his pastor's rambling sermons, "Well, anyway he preaches from his text." We shall proceed from both texts, from both topics.

All of us, I am sure, are interested in and more or less familiar with the new trends in rural reconstruction. There is considerable froth but underneath the froth and foam a real and powerful rising tide of interest in the problems of rural life. Professor J. B. Tayler says, "No problem is more fundamental or urgent; no other movement offers greater hope of the rebuilding of Chinese civilization. The silver lining to the dark clouds that lower in the China sky is nowhere more clearly seen than in the fact that national and provincial authorities, educationalists and social reformers, agriculturalists and rural economists, bankers and scientists, political parties and the Christian church, are each and all playing their part. It can fairly be claimed that the patient efforts of many pioneers in the field of rural improvement have developed to a point at which we can speak of the rural movement."

Many factors have brought about this movement. The realization that China's population is dominantly rural, the economic plight of the farmer and what is called "village bankruptcy," the exploitation of the villagers at the hands of many selfish interests, the lag of the villages behind the cities in modern development, Dr. Sun Yat-sen's emphasis upon "ming-sheng" or the livelihood of the people, signs of agrarian unrest, the challenge of communism, the fascinating possibilities in application of scientific knowledge and method to rural needs and problems, have all influenced the minds of thinkers and leaders in a rural direction. With many, no doubt, the idea of rural betterment is a passing fad and much discussion and writing about the idea is decidedly superficial. At the same time enough valuable studies, projects and experiments are being carried on today to justify our speaking of rural reconstruction.

The Christian church can claim a share in the beginning of this as of many educational and social movements. James Yen and several of his associates got their first vision of mass education or social education from their work among the Chinese laborers in the Y.M.C.A. Camps in France during the World War. After several years of general publicity and large literacy campaigns in which the Y.M.C.A. and some churches took active part an independent Mass Education Movement was organized; in 1926 the Movement selected Tinghsien as its experimental hsien and moved most of its large staff into the country. You are familiar with the aims and methods of this movement under James Yen's brilliant leadership. Society has four diseases: ignorance, poverty, sickness and selfishness. To heal these diseases there must be four types of social education: literacy education, livelihood education or education for economic improvement, health education and education in citizenship. Social education has three bases and directions: the home, the school and the community. Through research and experiments, materials and techniques for this social education and rural reconstruction are being worked out which can ultimately be applied with adaptation in other hsien. Recently training features have been added and plans for cooperation with the hsien and provincial governments and far greater use of political means are being launched. The influence of this movement has been so great that a prominent government official has spoken of James Yen as an "unrecognized minister in the Cabinet."

An equally significant experiment is that under direction of Liang Shu-mien at Tsouping, Shantung. Liang is a middle-aged philosopher who has left his cloistered study for the dust of Shantung roads and the hard practical problems of village rebuilding. Many Chinese consider his scholarship and genius equal to or even greater than that of Hu Shih. With his keen mind and his rich cultural background he describes China's rural problem as primarily one of a crumbling culture due to the impact of western ideas and methods. A new culture to meet the needs of the new day must be developed, a culture which will conserve the best of China's past, be built upon the principle of self-government and self-direction and gradually evolve into a democratic government of and for the people. Tsouping is an experimental hsien and a training center for the rural reconstruction work of Shantung province. In 1931 Mr. Liang with help from Governor Han Fu-chu established a provincial training school for rural workers. More than six hundred students have received the one year training at this center and have returned into the various hsien of the province to establish village and community schools.

Interest in agricultural education began to develop soon after the Revolution of 1911. The University of Nanking College of Agriculture was founded in 1915 and since then agricultural schools and departments have been started in almost every province. These are carrying on teaching, research and experiment, and extension work, in the more technical field of agriculture; their work, however, touches all phases of rural betterment. The China International Famine Relief Commission organized after the great famine of 1921 has carried on famine prevention work, has built roads with relief labor and has pioneered with marked success in the organization of rural cooperatives. The China Vocational Educational Association, the North China Association for Industrial Improvement, and other social-educational organizations have interesting rural experimental centers. Institu-

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tions of higher education have their rural laboratories: Yenching University at Chingho, Cheeloo University at Lunghwa, University of Nanking at Wukiang, Fukien Christian University at Niutien, Nanking Theological Seminary at Shunhwachen. Yenching University is considering how it may link its proposed program for training of rural administrators and rural social workers with rural laboratories at Tinghsien and elsewhere. Other institutions like Nankai University are grappling with social and economic problems of rural society. The Kiangsu Provincial College at Wusih is training mass education teachers.

Up to recently the rural movement has come from social and private groups. But now the government is awakening to the serious questions involved in the rural situation. We hear critics all about who say that the government is more of a hindrance than a help. But thanks to the communists and other violent stimuli the government is beginning to do some real work. The Health Administration in the Ministry of Interior is giving serious attention to rural health needs and extension, looking toward a national plan of medical relief and health education. The National Economic Council with the help of many expert advisers is working out a national policy for agricultural improvement and rural reform. This aims at providing ultimately the minimum essentials of education, health care, economic cooperation and agricultural improvement for rural China through the successive stages of survey, research and training; experimentation in applied technique; and a program of extension. The Executive Yuan in April, 1933, established a Rural Rehabilitation Committee with a large representative membership. The central government is drawing in an increasing number of specialists from educational and private groups to assist in research or planning and the tendency will probably be towards increasing cooperation with private or semi-private, agencies working in the rural field. Many experimental hsien have been started. Kiangning hsien, the nearest hsien to the capital, has launched a vigorous program of taxation reform, road-building, economic improvement and educational reorganization, under direction of the Central Political Institute. Shantung, Kiangsi and Kwangsi are provincial experiments worth observing during the next few years. Government built motor roads and now, in a new railway construction boom, railways are opening up inland China and formerly remote villages to easy communication and all kinds of new ideas and influences.

Even the large banks, with mixed motives it must be admitted, are increasingly concerned over the flow of money from the villages to the large cities and are seeking ways in which to invest in rural rehabilitation and to loan money safely to various types of rural cooperatives.

Two-thirds of the Protestant churches of China have been established in villages and small towns but only within the past decade has the church become keenly aware of its great and significant opportunity in constructive rural service. The drift for many years before had been to the cities and the building up of great city institutions. In 1929 the National Christian Council added a secretary for rural work to its staff. In 1930 and again in 1933 national conferences for Christian rural workers were held at Tinghsien while regional conferences had sections discussing rural work. The interest in Christianizing rural life which marked the Jerusalem Conference has been reflected in the Chinese church. Both the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. have in recent years started rural extension work. Several regional or provincial Christian rural service unions have been launched and we see or hear of all kinds of experiments, projects, new adventures in Christian evangelism, religious education, service and reconstruction, in embryo or in infancy here and there over China.

Last year an association of general rural workers--rural educators, directors of experiments, students of rural problems, some government leaders--was formed in a meeting at Tsouping. Hot debates took place over the philosophy and methods of rural reform but the association weathered the healthy differences of opinion and decided to meet again this year. Three hundred persons attended the second conference recently at Tinghsien.

W. T. Tao was forced to discontinue his rural normal school at Hsiao-chuang near Nanking after only two years but the influence of that brief experiment and of Tao's writings since that time have been a powerful force for better rural education. A growing stream, almost a flood, of books, magazines and magazine articles, surveys, reports and other literary material on rural problems and rural reconstruction is now pouring from the presses. Much of what is written is padded and superficial but extremely valuable material is also appearing. The intelligentsia are becoming rural minded. The few truly great thinkers and workers in this field are also becoming increasingly humble as they realize how complex and difficult the rural problem is and how long and difficult is the task of finding a fundamental and permanent solution. Think of the factors involved: the historical heritage and cultural background; geographical conditions and the recurrence of famines; the pressure of a too dense population; political instability, international problems, civil war and banditry; the precarious occupation of the farmer due to small farms and lack of applied science; economic factors such as small income, low standards of living, tenancy and high rates of interest; changes in social organizations and customs; health needs; communication and transportation difficulties; education for the villages, the type needed and how to provide it; recreation and the use of leisure winter months; the question of adequate rural leadership and organization; the kind of political system and social-economic order which rural China should have; moral and religious conditions and needs; the psychology of the villager and the whole question of the best approach to the villages and villagers. There is no panacea--political, educational, economic or religious!

Now to return to our prepositions, what is the significance of all this for Christian religious education, or of religious education in all this? I have tried to sketch this rising movement in China. Where does religious education fit into the picture? How will it be influenced? What is and what should be its contribution? I shall suggest a few points to start our thinking and discussion. Because of limit of time I shall have to state them rather briefly and perhaps dogmatically or in the form of unanswered questions; but you will feel free to criticise, revise and add.

1. Almost every phase of the rural problem, almost every problem in rural reconstruction as I study it, has some moral and religious implication or significance. Our attitude to it, the "way out" we propose, the method to employ will have to stand the test of our Christian principles. We may be indifferent as some are, and say, "This is no business of Christians or of the Christian church," but this very attitude is challenged by Jesus' concern and the concern which Christians should have for the whole man and whole society. Does not

salvation mean "wholeness?" Take the population question, for example, which at first seems rather remote from religious education. Let us ask ourselves this question: shall we espouse medical relief and health education, shall we help to save lives in famine, shall we oppose civil and international war and work for better living conditions; and at the same time ignore what it will mean in lowered standards of living, in less opportunity for unborn children, for China's population to continue increasing at the present rate of three million a year or a hundred million in thirty years? Now there are less than three mow of cultivated land per person in China. This may be increased somewhat by reclamation of new land and of course industries may be expected to increase. Yet the standard of living will remain deplorably low under existing conditions. Apart from political and social theories upon which we may disagree, are fundamental Christian principles of abundant life and opportunity for all upon which we do agree and which touch again and again the many aspects of rural reconstruction. Therefore Christian thinkers, Christian religious educators, Christian workers, must study and think through all these problems with Christian reference, upon a Christian basis, with a Christian goal. Religious education is called upon to help now in developing Christian attitudes, Christian public opinion and Christian lines of action in rural reconstruction.

2. All the new rural studies and experiments put great emphasis upon education. Whether they take as their center of rural reform the village school, the adult school, the experimental or extension farm, a new village industry, economic cooperatives, a community organization or a government institution, all advocate organization and the training of village people, young and adult. What kind of organization, what kind of education, what kind of citizens is the ideal? If religious education is the bridge between education and religion--the full life of education and the full life of religion bound up with another--then the Christian church and Christian religious educators must study trends in rural education, appreciate and build upon good rural education, test the aims and methods of general education by Christian principles and be ready to correct defects and supplement deficiencies in rural education as it develops by a strong program of Christian teaching for children, youth and adults--men and women--in the changing villages. Soon it will be true of China what Maurice Hindus says of Russia, "The villages are roaring with new ideas." Christian education has a responsibility in this ferment. For instance, some of the teaching material being produced at Tsouping in popular verse form is intensely and narrowly nationalist. Shall we accept and use such material, correct it, or supplement it with teaching on Christian world brotherhood and the Christian peace ideal?

3. As Liang Shu-mien says, the old culture of China is cracking under the attacks of imported culture, science, nationalism and modern education. The old culture will die hard; much in it will be and should be preserved. Liang Shu-mien sees our great task as that of helping to bring about a new rural culture, a new rural civilization that belongs to the new day and yet is rooted in the soil of ancient China and in the hearts of its common folk as much as the old culture was. Many forms of the popular religion, many religious customs and many superstitions, many religious sanctions will disappear along with the culture of yesterday. Hu Shih and others who believe that the Chinese people are essentially a humanistic and not a religious people, that naturalism is the prevailing philosophy and that modern science and civilization will bring more spiritual values to China than any old religion or religion from the West, are not deeply concerned over the passing of China's old religious culture. But many who live near to the villagers and know from experience their religious nature, and who realize how much of value in a culture goes along with religious sanctions, are concerned--concerned that a high religious faith rooting itself in China's soil as much as Buddhism shall supplant the lower faith, and that China's spiritual inheritance and destiny shall be fulfilled in a Christianity that is universal yet Chinese. Does this need in a time of transition not sound a call to the best religious educators in the church? To keep the spirit alive in rural reconstruction and to help the rural movement glow with holy faith and purpose means helping China save her soul. For in China today rural regeneration means national regeneration, with streams of new life flowing from the country into the cities.

4. A few years ago Chinese philosophers and writers were debating the question of a materialistic versus a spiritual philosophy of life. Today they are staging a "pen-battle" over the question whether reconstruction should be from the top down or from the bottom up. A leading educator like Chuang Tseh-hsuan says it is hopeless to talk about rural rehabilitation until there is a good government. All we can do is to stay the decay a little while. Liang Shu-mien comes back and says that genuine rebuilding must, according to the genius of China, be from the ground up, from the small to the large. Others take middle ground and advocate a combination of government planning and enterprise with large-scale reconstruction and of movements that start with local initiative and organization. I mention this controversy, of which many examples could be given, because it has a bearing on the place which the church is to have in rural reconstruction. The church cannot or should not use political power, although at times it has and still may unwisely become the tool of political systems or political forces. Under the law of China the church will be a private association of individuals. Sometimes it seems weak and impotent. Sometimes the government will appear to take over and accomplish in a few days or weeks what Christians in one little place had been trying rather unsuccessfully to do for years. But let us not forget that in China especially good government is dependent upon the people as well as upon a few individuals at the top. The church can help to train good citizens, Christian citizens of the republic. The church can help and help mightily in the rebuilding from the bottom up. It can in communities all over China educate, organize, train, befriend, guide, inspire little groups that will multiply and prepare for the new day. I feel that another revolution will have to come in China but it must have the support of intelligent masses, organized masses, self-disciplined masses, masses prepared to seek moral ends with moral means. The National Economic Council admits the need for such local work in its 1932 Report when it speaks of the need for men and women who shall be links between organizations and institutions outside and the village people. "Living on the spot, among the people they have to assist, in real understanding of their conditions, these could be the rural leaders. They could form the link between the government and the rural classes working to educate these classes in the spirit that the National Government wishes." No matter what our social or national ideal, the need for this reconstruction from the bottom up remains. And this presents a thrilling opportunity for the church. Is the church ready? Are Christians in China ready?

5. Is the church prepared to help in from-the-bottom-up reconstruction? When we look at the ten

thousand rural churches, chapels and home-congregations in China, most of them weak and struggling, the rural church does not seem ready. When we see the rise of various sects, when we observe the revival movement in Shantung and elsewhere with some good results but often marked by hysteria, wild emotionalism, ignorance and superstition and drawing the scorn of educated Chinese in and out of the church; when we consider that perhaps the majority of rural churches are suspicious of religious educationship, where is the consecrated and trained membership and community-serving program, where are the indigenous financial resources, where are the faith and vision and courage that the rural church may meet this need and opportunity? True, where? The answer is "here and there." We must start with the Christian fellowships as they are and educate them, leaders, members, parents, youth and children to this new conception of the mission of the church, the church helping in the fundamental reconstruction of China. How could we better bear witness to the Word of God? Let intelligence be added to piety, let the social vision be added to personal devotion, let ways of doing be added to the impartation of doctrine. Experiments here, projects there, a new adventure here, a piece of bold pioneering there, thorough research here, careful planning there, will point a new way. The rural church must be prepared for this new task. This long and difficult, seemingly impossible task, is our task, it seems to me; it is the task of all who are concerned with education for Christian living in rural China.

6. The whole Christian movement in China needs education for its rural mission, for the proclamation and living out of its rural gospel. The city churches must be helped to see their debt to and responsibility toward their sister churches in the villages. Let Christian colleges, middle schools, hospitals, theological and Bible schools, Christian social organizations, in the cities come together and consider how they may work unitedly on this great task of rural reconstruction which is national reconstruction. The reconstruction must begin with rebirth, yes, rebirth of individuals and rural society. We need to link together all rural workers with Christian purpose and spirit in a Christian rural fellowship, and help them to see the deeper significance of their task and to draw upon divine resources of strength. I think that the N.C.C.R.E. has a special opportunity here because it is interested in both evangelism and education, in educational evangelism; because it is an open-minded, forward-looking group which believes in the best educational processes as well as in the leading of the Spirit of God and in the power of Christ; because it can help to guide the Christian movement into intelligent, united and sacrificial effort for rural rebuilding, <u>from the bottom up</u>.

7. A word about the challenge of mass education and the new mass literature that is being produced. The Christian church, Christian religious educators and writers, will have to be growing and alert if they are to build upon this new literacy foundation and provide Christian literature for village people of as high literary quality and as close to village life as that now coming from some centers of the new rural movement. We see a beginning of better Christian literature for rural China in some recent productions and in "The Christian Farmer." But the field is largely uncultivated as yet. The hymns, the stories, the worship services, the readers and other books, the religious art so much needed for rural churches and homes, and much else that is needed, will be produced, I believe, by men and women of literary gifts and with deep love of Christ and of the common people who are willing to spend a large part of their time in the villages among the people for whom they are writing. Good Christian literature may be one of our best contributions to rural reconstruction.

8. Think of the significance of the new movement for our Christian schools and for the Christian student movement. Already we are seeing a most hopeful turning of student minds to rural problems and the beginning of dedication, almost a new student volunteer movement for Christian rural service. There is that group of over a dozen college graduates in the Christian project at Lichwan, Kiangsi. Students are spending summer vacations in villages, living in farmer homes. One-third of the sixty students at Nanking Seminary are taking our Rural Church Major Course which includes a year of agriculture and points definitely toward rural service with all its sacrifices. A Christian returned student is giving a year voluntarily at our Rural Church Center in Shunhwachen. Another Christian student walks out and back twice a month, fifteen miles each way, because he does not have enough money to ride, to teach voluntarily in a village Sunday School. Here is a new call to the Christian teacher.

9. Finally, transitional China is plastic. What kind of government, what kind of society is coming? We may have our different opinions....But we are all concerned that oppression should go and that justice should come. We are concerned that the villagers shall have abundant life--abundant economic life, when we know that four-fifths of the rural people in North China and a half in central China live below what the International Famine Relief Commission calls the minimum standard to "pass the days," at least 50 yuan total income for a family for a year--and abundant life of the mind and spirit. We are concerned that the ideals in the new rural movement shall be Christian ideals. We are concerned over the driving power in reconstruction. We are concerned over the social philosophy of it all, where the movement is leading, what means it will employ. We here believe that we have a message to give--of God and of Jesus Christ and of God's reign through human brotherhood and of God-guided and God-inspired life and experience that may be shared. If the Christian church has any distinct message, distinct mission, distinct life to give and to live, this is the day of opportunity. The opportunity may pass if we are not ready. It will be easier to let the church go along in the old way of not disturbing the community and hence not disturbed by the community. For the rural church to work at the heart of rural reconstruction will cost a great deal in thought, in energy, in opposition, perhaps in life. We will have to leave our cities and our institutions and spend more time among the common folk of the villages. We will have to prepare ourselves and help prepare the church, we who humbly believe in working with God and in letting Him work in us to achieve the ends of true growth. The task before us demands a combination of mysticism and spiritual insight at their best, a union of social intelligence and of passion to serve. We may see the Promised Land from afar but never enter it. And yet the ideal of a Christian rural society in China joining hands with a Christian rural society in other lands gleams before us and inspires us who would follow the Great Teacher and Lord. If we are true to our calling as Christian teachers, the vision will not let us rest, nor will it let generations of teachers who succeed us rest, until justice rolls down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream and the Reign of God comes with power in rural China.